

Message Text

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TO JCRC BARBERS POINT

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 073847

FOLLOWING REPEAT VIENTIANE 0350 ACTION SECSTATE INFO
BANGKOK MAR 17.

QUOTE: C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0350

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI PDIP SHUM CASC LA US

SUBJECT: AMERICAN MIA'S IN LAOS

REF: STATE 66207

SUMMARY: THE CHARGE MADE A DEMARCHE ON THE MIA ISSUE
AS DIRECTED BY THE DEPARTMENT TO LAO DEPUTY FOREIGN
MINISTER NOUPHAN ON MARCH 16. THE DIRECT NATURE OF THE
HIRC EAST ASIAN SUBCOMMITTEE'S INTEREST WAS EXPLAINED
AND EMPHASIZED. NOUPHAN REPLIED THAT INSTRUCTIONS HAD
BEEN ISSUED TO SEARCH FOR MIA INFORMATION. THE LACK OF
RESULTS THUS FAR WAS THE PRODUCT OF THE SERIOUS LAO
SECURITY SITUATION AND OF LOCAL POLITICAL PROBLEMS.

END SUMMARY.

1. I CALLED ON DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER NOUPHAN SITH-
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PASAY MARCH 16 TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION OF AMERICANS
MISSING IN ACTION IN LAOS.

2. I EXPLAINED THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF ASSISTANT SECRE-
TARY HOLBROOKE'S APPEARANCE BEFORE THE HOUSE INTER-
NATIONAL RELATIONS EAST ASIAN SUBCOMMITTEE. WITHOUT
MENTIONING THE EMERGENCY FOOD AID CONTEXT, I EXPLAINED

THAT CONGRESSMAN WOLFF HAD RAISED THE MIA ISSUE IN STRONG TERMS WITH MR. HOLBROOKE. I GAVE NOUPHAN A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE, ITS IMPORTANCE, AND OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ITS CHAIRMAN.

3. NOUPHAN SAID THAT IT WAS HIS UNDERSTANDING THAT EVERYONE AGREED THAT THERE WERE NO LIVE AMERICAN MIA'S IN LAOS. I SAID THAT ALL INDICATIONS POINTED TO THIS BEING THE CASE. THERE WERE NO LIVE AMERICAN MIA'S IN LAOS. I SAID THAT ALL INDICATIONS POINTED TO THIS BEING THE CASE. THERE WERE STILL, HOWEVER, PROBLEMS SURROUNDING THOSE MIA'S WHO COULD NOT BE PROVED TO BE DEAD AND WHOSE CASES WERE THUS THE CASE OF CONSIDERABLE ANGUISH TO THEIR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS. I SAID THAT CONGRESSMAN WOLFF FELT PERSONALLY VERY STRONGLY ABOUT THIS HUMANITARIAN PROBLEM.

4. NOUPHAN LAUNCHED INTO A GENERAL DISCUSSION OF LAO-U.S. RELATIONS. HE SAID THAT THE LPDR WANTED GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. LAOS HAD ASKED FOR EMERGENCY FOOD AID, AND THE U.S. HAD YET TO RESPOND. THE LAO GOVERNMENT HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT THE U.S. "DOES NOT CARE" ABOUT ITS RELATIONS WITH LAOS.

5. I EXPLAINED THAT WE DID NOT WANT TO MAKE A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE FOOD AID ISSUE AND THE MIA ISSUE.
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THEY WERE TWO SEPARATE HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS WHICH WE WERE TRYING TO DEAL WITH ON THEIR OWN SEPARATE HUMANITARIAN MERITS. NOUPHAN SAID IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR THE LAO TO LOOK AT THE MIA ISSUE FROM A HUMANITARIAN POINT OF VIEW. HE HAD TRIED, HOWEVER, TO BE RESPONSIVE. HE HAD ISSUED ORDERS THAT ATTEMPTS SHOULD BE MADE TO FIND BODIES OR INFORMATION IN CONNECTION WITH MIA'S. HE WOULD BE QUITE FRANK WITH ME, HOWEVER, IN SAYING THAT IT WAS DIFFICULT TO INSURE THAT HIS ORDERS WERE COMPLIED WITH. LAOS HAD A SERIOUS SECURITY PROBLEM, AND IT WAS NOT EASY TO PERSUADE PEOPLE TO GO OUT TO LOOK FOR BODIES IN AREAS INFESTED BY OR UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT GROUPS. IT WAS ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT TO PERSUADE PEOPLE TO TAKE SUCH RISKS WHEN THE BODIES WERE THE REMAINS OF PEOPLE WHO AT THE TIME THEY WERE KILLED HAD BEEN BOMBING AND SHOOTING AT THE PEOPLE WHO WERE NOW BEING ASKED TO LOOK FOR THEM.

6. I TOLD NOUPHAN THAT I COULD UNDERSTAND HIS PROBLEM BUT THAT I WANTED HIM TO BE AWARE THAT THERE WAS VERY HIGH LEVEL INTEREST IN THE MIA ISSUE. SOME PROGRESS WOULD DO A LOT TO IMPROVE THE ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH OTHER

ASPECTS OF LAO-U.S. RELATIONS WERE BEING CONSIDERED. NOUPHAN SAID THAT HE, TOO, THOUGHT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO IMPROVE THIS ATMOSPHERE AND MENTIONED WAYS IN WHICH HE THOUGHT THE LPDR HAD TRIED TO BE FORTHCOMING. I THANKED HIM FOR THIS ASSURANCE AND REPEATED MY AND CONGRESSMAN WOLFF'S REQUEST FOR SOME SORT OF FIRM INFORMATION ON THE MIA CASES ON WHICH WE HAD GIVEN DOSSIERS TO THE LAO.

7. COMMENT: WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED ASSURANCES ON THREE OCCASIONS DURING THE PAST YEAR FROM SENIOR LEVELS OF THE LAO FOREIGN MINISTRY THAT THE LPDR WOULD TRY OR HAD TRIED TO OBTAIN MIA INFORMATION (UNDER SECRETARY SOUBANH TO THE WOODCOCK COMMISSION ON MARCH 19, 1977, CONFIDENTIAL

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DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER NOUPHAN TO MR. OAKLEY ON MAY 24, 1977, AND NOW NOUPHAN TO ME). SO FAR NO HARD INFORMATION HAS BEEN FORTHCOMING, EXCEPT USSURANCES THAT THERE ARE NO LIVE MIA'S IN LAOS.

8. NOUPHAN'S REFERENCE TO THE LAO SECURITY PROBLEM SEEMS SIGNIFICANT. THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT THERE IS A SECURITY PROBLEM AND THAT IT AFFECTS THE MIA SEARCH. IT WILL PROBABLY GET WORSE AS THE CURRENT FOOD SHORTAGE INTENSIFIES BETWEEN NOW AND TTHE NEXT HARVEST. FOR NOUPHAN TO MENTION IT TO ME, HOWEVER, IS AN EMBARRASSING ADMISSION. SOME CREDIT AND CREDENCE SHOULD ALSO BE GIVEN TO HIS DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEMS FACED BY LOCAL OFFICIALS IN TRYING TO PERSUADE RURAL PEOPLE DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY THE WAR TO ENGAGE IN MIA SEARCHES.

9. I DO NOT THINK THAT EMBASSY VIENTIANE SHOULD BE AN APOLOGIST FOR THE LPDR. NEVERTHELESS, THE RECORD SHOULD SHOW THAT THEY HAVE TRIED TO COME UP WITH MIA INFORMATION. THEIR FAILURE THUS FAR TO RESPOND AS USEFULLY AS WE NEED IN ORDER TO RESOLVE THE CASES IS A PRODUCE OF LAOS' RUGGED TOPOGRAPHY, THE COUNTRY'S SPARSE POPULATION, THE LPDR'S SERIOUS SECURITY PROBLEM, THE LAO GOVERNMENT'S APPALLING WEAKNESS AND LACK OF CAPABILITY, AND THE BITTER MEMORIES OF MANY OF THOSE WHO MUST ACTUALLY CONDUCT THE SEARCHES. ROBERTS UNQUOTE VANCE

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